

The Pittsylvania Packet

Spring 2006

Number 60



Pittsylvania Historical Society

Chatham, Virginia

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Visit the Pittsylvania Historical Society's website at:

www.PittsylvaniaHistoricalSociety.org

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Blue Means Renew!

If you have a blue mark on your mailing label, PHS records show that you did not renew before March 8th, 2006. This will be your last issue of the *Pittsylvania Packet*. (Please contact the editor if you believe that the PHS records are in error and you have renewed.) See membership rates, info on back cover.

Spring Membership Meeting Monday Evening, April 17th, 2006 7:30pm

The membership meeting will be held on April 17th at 7:30 PM at the 1813 Clerk's Office behind Town Hall in Chatham. The movie *Down in the Old Belt: Voices from the Tobacco South* will be shown (much of the movie was filmed in Pittsylvania County). Film-maker James P. Crawford will be on hand to discuss the making of the movie.

If circumstances warrant, the showing may have to be moved to a larger venue. Watch future issues of the *Star-Tribune* for more details, and/or call Mary Catherine Plaster at 434-432-8945 closer to the date.

Pittsylvania Historical Society's Website Launched

PittsylvaniaHistoricalSociety.org is now online. The website includes a selection of Pittsylvania Packet articles from the last 15 years, a history of the PHS, membership information, and more.

Deadline for Submissions

Please submit any announcements, articles, etc. for the next issue of *The Pittsylvania Packet* by June 1st, 2006. Queries and articles are always welcome!

Update on the Southern Railway Depot Restoration

by Glenn Giles

On February 22, 2006, after eight years of frustrations and delays, your Historical Society opened bids for Phase I of the Southern Railway Depot Restoration project in Chatham. The Phase I portion of the restoration involves the demolition of the deteriorated roof of the depot, built in 1918, and the installation of terra cotta (or burgundy) French-tile roof. Construction will start after VDOT and the Pittsylvania County Board of Supervisors, sponsors of the project, formally approve the contractor low bid.

The Society purchased the depot in 2001 and Ennis Business Forms donated the old Southern States property adjacent to the depot. Reimbursable Transportation Enhancement (TE-21) grants have been awarded for 80% of the construction costs in Phase I. The Historical Society must provide the remaining 20% of the project cost.

Citizen donations for the depot purchase, the value of the Ennis Building donation, a DHR Grant, and Society funds cover the estimated 20% project cost share. However, since construction material costs have skyrocketed recently, we are asking area businesses, manufacturers, and service providers to assist us in the preservation of this community icon by donating goods or in-kind services to help with our 20% required fund match for this and future phases of the restoration project.

Donations from the Historical Society members are welcomed and should be mailed to P. O. Box 1148, Chatham, VA 24531, and designated for the Depot Restoration Project.

Our Covered Bridge

by James E. Stone (written circa 1980)

submitted by Barbara Stone Mackin

In today's world a covered bridge is a curio, a relic of a by-gone age, but in the early days of our existence as a nation there were a great many and they made possible the crossing of streams that would otherwise have been extremely difficult to cross. I have read that Vermont led all of the states of the nation in the number of covered bridges built, but Virginia had its share, though just how many I have never known. There is still one in Virginia that remains in a class by itself, the Humpback Bridge at Covington across the Potts Creek.

On my father's farm where I was born and reared, we had such a bridge, at least, one end of it was on our farm. Ours was a relatively large farm that extended along the north side of Banister River for something like two miles, some four or five miles west of the Pittsylvania-Halifax County line. To give some idea of the size of the stream, consider that it rose in the western reaches of Pittsylvania County, the largest county of the state, and flowed eastward clean across the county and the adjoining county of Halifax to unite with the Dan River near the extreme eastern edge of Halifax.

As can be seen, the river was a pretty sizable stream. In our locale the river was the dividing line between the Mt. Airy community on the north side, where our farm was located, and the Riceville community where our church and school were located. Hence, a very large part of our going and coming was across this river on our covered bridge. The much-used crossing not only connected two communities but the highway was one of the leading north-south feeder highways for the

Danville tobacco market. Also, on the Mt. Airy side there was a much-used saw mill and grist mill. Later on, the grist mill was converted into an outstanding roller mill where farmers could have their wheat ground into the very best grade of flour. There were no other crossings, either up or down river, for at least ten miles, so you can see the importance of this crossing.

History of the Bridge

The bridge was built in 1896 (the year I was born), and about a mile upstream from where the original bridge was located. I suppose that had been the main crossing of Banister River since the county was first settled. I do know the old road leading down to the original crossing from Mt. Airy crossed our place for something like a mile and for much of the distance, even today, huge gullies mark the old road bed, and the old bridge pier of native stone marks the old bridge location. In fact, the house in which I was born and in which a younger brother now lives, was built in 1828 and was located on this main north-south highway.

When the old bridge was carried away by high water and its location abandoned in favor of the upstream location of the “new” covered bridge, the old highway was abandoned and relocated for a stretch of two miles on our side of the river leaving us nearly a half mile from a public road. There is an old mill site just below the old crossing which no doubt accounted for the crossing being located there in the first place. The mill was abandoned long before my father’s time, but I have heard him say the old location was very undesirable because the road leading to it crossed a long section of low ground that was impossible to drain in those days and was subject to overflow whenever there was the least bit of flooding.

Construction of the Bridge

Now, more about the bridge. The covered part, from pier to pier, was 100 feet. The approaches on either end were about 100 feet. These were not covered but they sloped downward so it was impossible to see whether there was anyone coming from the other end as you entered your end. The bridge was a single lane all the way, quite high, and above the known high water marks of previous floods. Many are the hair-raising experiences I can recall in trying to back a horse and buggy off the bridge because the other fellow started across the bridge first. Wagons always had preference over buggies and this was the reason the bridge was such a “bug-a-boo” for women drivers, and because of its height the bridge was a little hazardous for all drivers. Especially hazardous was nighttime travel, when very few, if any, travelers carried a light. Of course, all of this changed when autos made their appearance.

One other feature which should be mentioned was that the flooring consisted of two inch oak boards, twelve inches wide, lying loose on stringers. They always made some noise when any kind of vehicle crossed. When cars came into use you would almost swear you heard thunder when an auto crossed at a normal speed, likely not more than twenty miles per hour in the early days. The worst feature of the bridge was that the covered part was very dark even during the day because it had no side openings. At night, well you just let your horse have his way, hoping he, or they, if there were two horses, would stay in the center lane and you would not meet anyone or anything. Of course, as kids, fearful imaginings never bothered us as long as we were going or coming with someone else who was doing the driving or who was responsible, but as we grew older and began to visit our friends on the Riceville side, all the wild stories about the goblins and ghosts that

hung around the covered bridge didn't help to keep us very calm. Looking back some sixty odd years, most of the girls of my early courting days lived across the river, although the one I finally married lived the other way. Our first home, however, was located on a high cliff overlooking this bridge.

The Day of the Flood

The object of this story is to tell about the time the bridge washed away. I think it happened on March 12, 1910. My younger brother, Fred, and I were attending the Riceville school some three miles from home. Most of time we walked, using all the cut-off paths and short cuts available to shorten the distance perhaps as much as a half mile. On bad weather days, we might be able to ride double on one horse, or if the day was very bad we would get to use the buggy, the one with a top. On this particular day, the rain came down so hard that when we went out to get the horse to hitch to the buggy our father told us to wait a few minutes to see if the rain would let up. But if anything, it rained harder. Finally, Father told us to just not go to school but to help him at the tobacco barn where he was preparing a curing of tobacco for market. We were more than delighted. Well, it rained harder and harder, if possible, until about four or five o'clock that afternoon, and at about the time of day we would have been coming home from school. Suddenly, one of our tenants came running to tell us the bridge had washed away. We were all so stunned we couldn't believe it. As late as it was, we had to get a horse and ride down about a mile to see for ourselves. Since that long ago day, I have often wondered what the rainfall measured that particular day. Anyway, the river passed all previous high water marks.

Father said he knew the Lord had a hand in keeping us at home that day, for had we gone, we might have been caught up in the flood some way or certainly we would have had to stay somewhere

in Riceville for the next several days. There was no such thing as a telephone at our house or even in the community so our father would have had no way of knowing our whereabouts. As it turned out, we lost considerable time from school. Our first trip back to school was by horseback. We used an old ford just above the bridge site. It took a lot of clearing and cleaning to get it opened and even then it was not very satisfactory for vehicles as the bank was steep and the ford very rough. Anyway, we did start back to school and before long Father built us a boat to use when we could not get a horse to ride.

Finding the Bridge Downriver

A little more about the bridge. All covered bridges, I assume, are wooden or they would not be covered. Such was our bridge which was put together with big wooden pins. The roof has wood shingles. When the water swept it off its piers, it floated downstream in one piece and upon reaching the point where the river spread out over our low grounds, it left the main channel and came to rest on our side about 100 feet from the main channel and one mile downstream. After the river had receded and the bridge had dried out, an inspection revealed that everything about the bridge was intact, and only one small piece of timber was broken. Sometime that summer the county contracted with a builder to put the bridge back. Accordingly, the wooden pins were knocked out completely, the parts disassembled, and all were hauled back and reassembled on the old piers, where it remained in use another thirty years or more until it was replaced by a steel bridge some 100 feet or more upstream. The old covered bridge was dismantled and moved away.

*Editor's Note: Parts of the area discussed in this article were featured in the 1993 documentary, **History and Mystery on the Banister River** (available on VHS at the Pittsylvania County Public Library).*

The Stewart Family of Pittsylvania, Amelia, Henrico and Other Counties

by Betty Brown

The older John Stewart (the father) was born around 1700 and was a resident of Dale Parish, Henrico County, Virginia. He married Mary Bowman, the daughter of Edward Bowman in St. Paul's Parish, in 1722. John and Mary ended up in Amelia County, Virginia where John left a will, written 1777, proven 1779 (Amelia County, Virginia Will Book 2, page 325). His will names his sons, among them John (who was the author of the 1774 letter that follows), Littleberry (referred to as "Berry" in the letter), and Charles.

The younger John Stewart (author of the letter) was born around 1725/30. He was married to Susanah, who is thought to have been Susanah Kelly, as the 1774 letter mentions "brother" John Kelly. There is no other way he could have been related and referred to as "brother." John and Susanah Stewart had left Amelia County and had settled in Pittsylvania County by 1774 as indicated by the letter and also by the 1774 Tithe List of Hugh Innes for Pittsylvania County.

The younger John Stewart resided on the Blackwater River in the area of Pittsylvania County that would later become part of Henry County and, still later, part of Franklin County. He received a grant of 225 acres which he sold in Franklin County, Virginia in 1791. Following this sale of land, he may have moved to North Carolina where other members of his family settled.

Here is a copy of a family letter (with original spelling, grammar, and punctuation):

Mr. John Stewart
Nottoway Parish Amelia County Virginia
6th May 1774

Dear Father John Davis brought your letter today and I write to tell you how pleased I am to hear from you as well as to share a few lines about your family here in Pittsylvania. Susanah as you know from brother John Kelly was very sickly and has been slow to mend. She is a good and dutyful wife and I must confess my fear was that she might never be any better. As for the children our Cely has taken to herself a husband since I wrote you Mr. Benjamin Ward. They stay with his brother Daniel Ward but talk much of going to Carolina. Jack tends to run wild much to the worry of his Mother and this does not help to better her poor state of health. Dan now stands as tall as brother Berry and is a favorite with the ladys [sic]. He is a fine son and in his conduct is much like brother Charles. Our Mary is a great comfort. Never was a girl more properly named for Mother being a most sensible girl and since Susanahs illness has taken charge of her Mothers dutys. It has been near five years since our Jesse left us and never is the day we do not think of our dear boy lost at such a tender age. As for myself I am in perfect health. I close with our respects to you and Mother and all the family. May God keep and bless you all.

Your son
John Stewart
Pittsylvania County Virginia¹

(1) Letter copied from original owned by Mr. Joseph Ward of Watauga County, North Carolina (now deceased).

**Third Lieutenant Dryden Wright, Pigg
River Invincibles, Co. C2, 46th Virginia
Infantry:
Letters to Home — September 1863 to
April 1864 (Part I)**

by Stephen Thornton

Introduction

Dryden Wright's letters were recently found by the author while he was researching soldiers' letters at The Library of Virginia. They were acquired in 2003 after having been sold on the internet to a history-minded person who, in turn, offered them to the library. The article shows us how much information can be gleaned from "letters to home" — much of it highly useful to the examining historian in documenting the company's service.

Highly interested in all of the various companies that were formed from the Pigg River area, Co. C2, 46th Virginia Infantry is of intense interest to the author because of its association with a seldom-studied brigade. I am working on graduate research and writing and am attempting to focus, when possible, on Pittsylvania County or the general area. Current projects includes creating a detailed map of the northwestern portion of the county at 1860. Determination of public or private roads and farm locations in this area, and/or information (diaries, letters, artifacts, oral history, photos — including buildings) concerning any soldiers from the area is urgently sought for assistance in current and future projects.

If you have any information to share, please contact Stephen Lee Thornton, 10218 Natural Bridge Rd., Richmond, VA, 23236 or <thorntons@vcu.edu>. (Note from the editor: the article will be continued in the next few issues of the *Packet*.)

Third Lieutenant Dryden Wright's first letter home was written from his brigade's base camp at Chaffin's Bluff, situated on the north side of the

James River across and a short distance downriver from Drewry's Bluff. The Chaffin farm had been Brigadier General Henry A. Wise's headquarters just prior to the Seven Days' Battle of late June-July 1862 and onward. Wise and his command were responsible for guarding the peninsula from White House Landing on the Pamunkey River south toward the James River. The Pigg River Invincibles spent much of the time in and about New Kent Court House during this period, somewhere between White House and Barhamsville, positioned to repel Federal advances from Williamsburg and Fortress Monroe. The 46th Virginia returned to Chaffin's Bluff in late June 1863, where they remained until the brigade pulled out of the camp in mid-September.¹ A lieutenant in the relieving brigade described the camp as

the most comfortable quarters we had occupied during the war. The men of Wise's brigade had . . . made themselves decidedly comfortable — judging from . . . turnip-patches and other evidences of gardening. They had cows and chickens and were living at home, as our boys expressed it. Good log houses with bunks, and wide fireplaces, and brick hearths in some instances.²

The brigade's comfortable lifestyle and relatively safe duty at Chaffin's Farm and on the peninsula had earned them unflattering nicknames among the soldiery and the press such as "The Life Insurance Brigade" and "Wise's Gardeners."³ Besides living on produce that the brigade raised at Chaffin's Bluff, goods from home were always a welcome addition to army rations. Lieutenant Wright and his father took advantage of the brigade's stationary position by sending loads of produce for sale as evidenced in the following letter.⁴

Camp 46th Va Regt
Chafins Farm
Sept 4th 1863

Dear Pa. Lewis arrived safe at camp the night of the 2nd Inst with all the things except the loss of eight chickens that died on the way to Danville. I would not have sent him home at the time I did had I known that your wagon was absent and that you would have to hire one. The things he brought we are very well pleased with and can find ready sale for at a good profit besides what we consume. I have sent in a leave of absence for 15 fifteen days to come home and think the chance very good to get it. I could have gotten one for seven 7 days before now, but I thought I would try and get fifteen or wait awhile longer. I think Lewis's trip will pay us very well. Lewis tells me that you have a good deal of fruit if so I think you had best have it Stilled as it would pay best in my opinion used in that way. The revival is still successfully progressing in our Regt and every where in the army that I can hear from.⁵ This leaves me well.

Your son til death.
Dryden Wright ⁶

Lewis was likely one of the 46 slaves listed as belonging to Joseph Wright in 1860.⁷ It is evident from the letter that Lewis was with Wright for some time and then was sent home to bring back a load of goods for sale. . . .

Wright's chances for the fifteen day furlough were good, indeed. It was approved at headquarters on the very day he was writing; Wright likely finished selling his goods before leaving for home.⁸ Regardless, he would have missed the brigade's departure from Chaffin's Bluff on September 14 for Charleston, South Carolina, where they arrived

September 18.⁹

- (1) Darrell L. Collins, *46th Virginia Infantry* (Lynchburg: H.E. Howard Publishing Co., 1992), 41-4.
- (2) William N. Wood, *Reminiscences of Big I* (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1997), 52. Wood later described the cabins as “slab-roof huts.” Page 53 contains an amusing tale concerning a resident feline, partly explained by the chapter’s title – “The Cat Wouldn’t Cook Done.”
- (3) Collins, *46th Virginia*, 44.
- (4) Dryden Wright was an original volunteer and First Sergeant of the company in June 1861. He was elected to the Third (a.k.a. Junior Second or Brevet Second) Lieutenant position when the company reorganized May 19, 1862. Wright’s brother (later mentioned) and his cousins William H. and Abraham M. Wright were also original volunteers. William was First Lieutenant, though like Captain Isaac H. Watson, he either was not reelected or resigned at the reorganization. Dryden is listed on the 1860 Census as a 19 year-old clerk (he was born November 9, 1840) on his father Joseph Wright’s plantation, which at \$52,490 was the most valuable property represented in the ranks of the company – whether held by the individual soldier, their parent, or their employer (if any).
- (5) The subject of religious revivals that swept the Confederate armies is covered in J. William Jones, *Christ in the Camp; or, Religion in the Confederate Army* (Harrisonburg: Sprinkle Publications, 1986).
- (6) Dryden Wright. Letters, 1863-1864. Accession 40763. Personal Papers Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia (hereafter noted as Wright Letters, LVA).
- (7) United States Census Office, 8th Census, 1860, Virginia Population Schedules, 1860. Accession 29186. Federal Government Record Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia (noted as 1860 Census). It is quite possible that this is the same Lewis Wright, 33, Black, Chatham P.O., Pittsylvania, in Bradley W. Stuart, ed., *Virginia 1870 Census Index*, 4 vols. (Bountiful, UT: Precision Indexing, 1989), 4:3781. The 1860 Census Slave Schedules list a black male at 24 years old among the group of ten possible males ages 17 to 36 that could be Lewis.
- (8) Compiled Service Records, 46th Virginia Infantry, Microfilm Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia (hereafter noted as CSR, 46th Virginia, LVA).
- (9) Collins, *46th Virginia*, 45. Service records indicate that Captain Yeatts waited behind to tie up the company’s loose ends (e.g. - baggage forwarding, waiting for furlough returns). Yeatts enlisted Private David Owen at Chaffin’s on September 17, 1863 – likely a recruit forwarded by Wright. Wright apparently left home before his full furlough was taken and returned with a recruit, as he enlisted Private John D. Bailey at Richmond on September 18.

Chatham Baptist Church News of 1869

“Some of the Lady members of the Baptist Church at this place, are canvassing for subscriptions to purchase an organ for their house of worship. We are glad to learn the Ladies in this instance as usual, are meeting with encouraging success, and it may be safely taken for granted that the Instrument will soon be ordered and put in its place. We understand it is proposed to purchase a cabinet organ at a price not exceeding \$150.”

From *The Chatham Tribune*, Vol. 1, No. 12, Pittsylvania Court House, Virginia, December 8, 1869. Transcribed by Henry H. Mitchell.

Spring Garden in 1835

“SPRING GARDEN . . . is situated 18 [miles] N[orth] of Danville, and 8 E[ast] of *Competition*. It contains a country store, house of entertainment, and a blacksmith shop. There is a Baptist house of worship in the neighborhood, called ‘Shockoe meeting house.’ The soil in the immediate neighborhood is not very fertile, The productions are tobacco, wheat, corn, oats, &c.: that of the surrounding country is more so, being well adapted to wheat; large crops of which will probably be raised as soon as the Roanoke improvements [that would make transporting crops easier], which are now in a state of forwardness, shall have been completed.”

From Joseph Martin, *A New and Comprehensive gazetter of Virginia, and the District of Columbia: containing a copious collection of geographical, statistical, political, commercial, religious, moral and miscellaneous information*, J. Martin, Charlottesville, VA, 1835.

Research Queries

I am researching the Haden family. If anyone has any information or photos to share please contact me.

Staci Haden, 84 Nottingham Rd., Hagerstown, MD 21740, 301-665-2843, <shaden84@msn.com>

I am doing research on the Fenlaw (Fendlay), Stone, and Price families who were in Pitttsylvania County in 1840 and 1850. If anyone has information to share, please contact me:

Betty Jon Gorman, P. O. Box 113, Diana, TX 75640

Pittsylvania Historical Society Books

The Historical Society books are currently available for purchase from the following retailers. Suggested retail prices do not include shipping, handling, or tax.

Chatham Books, 10 North Main Street, P. O. Box 71,
Chatham, VA 24531, 434-432-2488,
<<http://www.ChathamBooks.us>>,
<chathambooks@gamewood.net>

Danville Museum of Fine Arts & History, 975 Main Street,
Danville, VA 24541, 434-793-5644

Mitchells Publications, P. O. Box 429, Chatham, VA 24531,
434-432-0595, 1-800-967-2867,
<<http://www.MitchellsPublications.com>>,
<answers@foodhistory.com>

News and Novels, 3282 Riverside Drive, Danville, VA 24541,
434-793-3407

Shadetree Rare Books, P. O. Box 994, Chatham Antique Gallery, Chatham, VA 24531, 434-432-1400, <<http://www.ShadetreeRareBooks.com>>, <hhurt@adelphia.net>

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Maud Carter Clement, *History of Pittsylvania County* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$22.

Madelene Fitzgerald, *Pittsylvania Homes and History of the Past* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$18.

Madelene Fitzgerald and Frances Hallam Hurt, *18th Century Landmarks of Pittsylvania County, Virginia* (Softcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$11.

Gray's *Map of Chatham, Virginia 1878* (Frameable Map) Suggested Retail Price: \$3.

Frances Hallam Hurt, *An Intimate History of the American Revolution in Pittsylvania County, Virginia* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$15.

Herman Melton, *Pittsylvania County's Historic Courthouse: The Story Behind Ex Parte Virginia and the Making of a National Landmark* (Softcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$11.

Herman Melton, *Pittsylvania's Eighteenth-Century Grist Mills* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$23.

Herman Melton, *Pittsylvania's Nineteenth-Century Grist Mills* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$23.

Herman Melton, *Thirty-Nine Lashes Well Laid On: Crime and Punishment in Southside Virginia 1750—1950* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$22.

Judge Langhorne Jones, *Tales from a Small Town* (Softcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$5.